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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
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SUBJECT: MBALEKWA ON UPM STRUCTURE, PLATFORM, STRATEGIES

REF: (A) HARARE 1420 (B) HARARE 982

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1

Summary

[11.](#) (C) In a November 18 meeting with poloff, United People's Movement (UPM) principal Pearson Mbalekwa said the party was concentrating on building organizational structures and a platform that would make it competitive in local elections by next year. He said that the movement continued to draw strength from ruling party personnel and would aggressively hammer wedge issues to further divide the ruling party. He confirmed that the UPM was talking to but not actively courting both MDC factions and had no plans to join in any MDC-led mass action. Mbalekwa inquired about international NGOs and other players that might be willing to help the movement with training or travel needs. End Summary.

Developing Structure, Platform

[12.](#) (C) According to Mbalekwa, the UPM had formal structures in all provinces save Mashonaland Central and Manicaland. A "national executive" that included Mbalekwa, independent MP Jonathan Moyo, and ex-ZANU-PF Masvingo Chairperson Daniel Shumba among others met once every two weeks. He claimed response in urban and rural areas was "tremendous" due to wide disgust with ruling party mismanagement and public loss of confidence in the MDC. Significant players in the ruling party and state apparatuses, such as the CIO (Mbalekwa's former employer), remained sympathetic to or aligned with the UPM, even if their association remained private. He claimed Emmerson Mnangagwa was satisfied with the movement's progress and remained quietly behind the group but would not comment on plans for Manangagwa's association to be publicly disclosed.

[13.](#) (C) Mbalekwa reported that the party was working on a manifesto that would be released in the coming months and that the party would begin to contest rural and urban council elections in the coming year. He shared with poloff a pamphlet (pouched to AF/S), which laid out party principles and goals. The manifesto was focused on pro-democracy rhetoric and on the need to address Zimbabwe's economic crisis. In particular, Mbalekwa said the GOZ's conceptually popular but ultimately failed land reform program was a divisive issue ripe for UPM exploitation. The UPM's plan was to restore confidence in the agricultural sector by compensating previous farm owners (largely with international participation), conducting a comprehensive land audit, and establishing a freehold title system.

Overcoming ZANU-PF Advantages

[14.](#) (C) Mbalekwa said the UPM planned to actively exploit existing tensions in the ruling party. Reported GOZ plans to amend the constitution to consolidate presidential and parliamentary elections in 2010 and to permit a Vice President to complete a President's remaining term, for example, were resented widely as a strategem to perpetuate Zezuru dominance. According to Mbalekwa, Mugabe had recognized the potential explosiveness of the issue and squelched efforts to include the measure in the constitutional amendment package adopted in September. To exacerbate succession fissures and thwart the plan, the UPM would foment calls outside and inside the party for elections to be consolidated and held in advance of 2008.

[15.](#) (C) The ex-ZANU-PF Central Committee member acknowledged that the ruling party's patronage system presented an obstacle but stressed that the UPM was equipped to overcome it. The key was convincing people that the system made them vulnerable not empowered. Mbalekwa claimed that the UPM could succeed in this effort because, unlike the MDC, it had ?liberation? credentials and organizational skills. Moreover, the government had proven afraid to pursue

politicized seizures of farms from UPM figures like himself with "liberation" credentials and that had weakened the patronage system's deterrent effect on ruling party members considering joining the UPM.

Relations With MDC

16. (C) Mbalekwa noted that the UPM had met with both MDC factions but was inclined to let the dust settle on factional conflict before it proceeded any further with potential collaboration or alliances. Not wanting to inherit MDC factional rifts or its foreign associations, the UPM would want to take on MDC luminaries individually, rather than as factions that would then operate as such within the UPM. He noted that the masses were sick of ZANU-PF but were put off by the MDC's foreign associations and well-established inability to deliver and predicted that the UPM would easily displace the MDC as the main opposition to the government before the next general elections.

17. (C) Mbalekwa criticized the interest of the MDC and some in civil society in mass action. Zimbabweans were exhausted and needed more education and organization before such tactics would be productive, Mbalekwa concluded. The UPM would eschew mass action for now, focusing instead on recasting the national debate to the ruling party's disadvantage and on mobilizing people for coming elections. He predicted that the experience, connections, stature, and savvy of UPM principals would enable the party to overcome ruling party intimidation and election-rigging measures, unlike the naive and unprepared MDC.

Party Financing

18. (C) Mbalekwa said the UPM had adequate "seed money" and was producing pamphlets, t-shirts, and rallies in order to project itself. It was establishing networks in the diaspora, where he claimed there was great interest. Party principals hoped to travel to the South Africa, the U.K., Australia, and the United States next year to tap diaspora coffers but needed to first build greater credibility at home. In the meantime, the party was looking for funds to support training and travel and Mbalekwa asked for Embassy assistance in identifying NGOs and other players who could help support its activities.

Comment

19. (C) The UPM's most identifiable principals - Emmerson Mnangagwa and Jonathan Moyo - each carry heavy liabilities with both domestic and international audiences for their association with past ruling party oppression. In addition, like the opposition MDC, it lacks resources or a reliable platform from which to deliver its message in an environment where the ruling party directs the full power of the state to its advantage. That said, Zimbabwe's dysfunctional political landscape and leadership vacuum suggest obvious opportunities for a third force and the UPM is well-positioned, especially in the event of a ruling party crack-up over Mugabe's succession, to take advantage of those opportunities.

SCHULTZ